

*GENERAL JOHN POPE*  
(AP-110)  
Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet  
Benicia vicinity  
Solano County  
California

HAER CA-343  
*HAER CA-343*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### *GENERAL JOHN POPE* (AP-110)

HAER No. CA-343

**Location:** Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet, Benicia vicinity, Solano County, California

**Type of Craft:** P2-S2-R2/Auxiliary

**Trade:** Troopship

**Class:** *General*

**Principal Dimensions:** Length (oa): 622'-7"  
Beam: 75'-6"  
Draft: 25'-6"  
Displacement: 19,650 long tons  
Gross registered tonnage: 17,833 tons  
Maximum continuous shaft horsepower: 17,000  
Service speed: 19 knots  
(The listed dimensions are as built, but it should be noted that draft, displacement, and tonnages were subject to alteration over time as well as variations in measurement.)

**Propulsion:** Geared steam turbine, twin shaft

**Dates of Construction:** 21 March 1943 – 5 August 1943

**Designer:** U.S. Maritime Commission

**Builder:** Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Kearney, New Jersey

**Present Owner:** U.S. Maritime Administration

**Disposition:** Inactive—National Defense Reserve Fleet  
**Postscript:** The ship was sold for scrapping in 2010.

**Significance:** At the time of the documentation, the *General John Pope* was the sole remaining ship afloat in the P2-S2-R2 class and was notable for its longevity as a troopship that participated in World War II as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars.

**Historian:** Brian Clayton, winter 2008

**Project  
Information:**

This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the HAER program.

The documentation was prepared under the direction of Todd Croteau (HAER Maritime Program Coordinator). Ashley T. Walker generated the vessel drawings. Brian Grogan (Photography + Preservation Associates) produced the large-format photographs. Special thanks to Erhard Koehler (U.S. Maritime Administration) whose help and assistance greatly benefitted the project.

## BACKGROUND

When the United States entered World War II, one of the first priorities was the construction of ships. The global experience and ferocity of World War I taught the United States that World War II would be on a grander scale and in more places, involve more people, and require more equipment—total war.<sup>1</sup> During World War II, the U.S. Maritime Commission became a pivotal force in the development and construction of ships, much like the U.S. Shipping Board had been in World War I. Created in 1936, the Maritime Commission succeeded the Shipping Board, but generally followed the same directive: the promotion of U.S. shipping interests. After the United States entered World War II, the Maritime Commission created the Emergency Program, a massive ship construction plan that utilized new and existing shipyards across the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Under the direction of Adm. Howard L. Vickery (Vice-Chairman), the Maritime Commission ordered the design of two classes of transports: the *Admiral* and *General* classes. The commission awarded two contracts for twenty troopships in January 1942. The first contract went to Federal Shipbuilding and Company in Kearny, New Jersey, for ten ships (*General* class, P2-S2-R2), and the second contract was awarded to Alameda-Bethlehem in Alameda, California, for the remaining ten (*Admiral* class, P2-SE2-R1). These troopships were designed to be convertible to a cruise liner or cargo ship after the war. Vickery thought that the American President Lines could manage the ships being built at Bethlehem for operation in the Far East, and Grace Line or Moore-McCormack could employ Federal's ships in South America.<sup>3</sup>

## P2 DESIGN

The P2 transport design was based on two requirements: a speed of 19 knots and a light displacement around 10,000 tons. There were key differences, however, between the *General* and *Admiral* classes of transports. Ships in the *Admiral* class measured 608'-11" long overall and 75'-6" amidships with a limiting draft of 26'-6".<sup>4</sup> The *General*-class transports, on the other hand, were 622'-7" long overall and 75'-6" amidships with a limiting draft of 25'-6". The former carried between 4,650 and 5,000 troops while the latter could carry about 5,500 troops. The *General* class ships could carry more cargo than the *Admiral* class ships: 100,000 cubic feet as opposed to 36,000 to 48,000 cubic feet. The steaming radius of the two classes differed as well at 12,000 nautical miles for the former and 15,000 for the latter. The design characteristics of each ship served the proposed route intended in the postwar environment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1973), pp. xxi-xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> René De La Pedraja, *A Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Merchant Marine and Shipping Industry Since the Introduction of Steam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 563-566, 629-631. During World War II, the Maritime Commission issued contracts for 5,601 vessels. Private firms built another 111 ships, while foreign firms produced sixty-five for a total of 5,777.

<sup>3</sup> Frederic C. Lane, *Ships for Victory: A History of Shipbuilding under the U.S. Maritime Commission in World War II* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1951), p. 624.

<sup>4</sup> See HAER No. CA-344, *General Edwin D. Patrick* for an example of the *Admiral* class.

<sup>5</sup> L.A. Sawyer and W.H. Mitchell, *From America to United States: The History of the Merchant Ship Types Built in the United States of America under the Long-Range Programme of the Maritime Commission* (Kendal, UK: World Ship Society, 1979), p. 107.

## CONSTRUCTION

In 1941, Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company received the contract from the Maritime Commission to build ten P2-S2-R2 troop transports, including the *General John Pope*. U.S. Steel had established the yard in 1917 under the subsidiary company Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company and had purchased 160 acres of land in Kearny, New Jersey, beside the Hackensack River, which flows into Newark Bay. After the United States entered World War I in 1917, Federal Shipbuilding began constructing cargo ships for the U.S. Shipping Board. The company continued producing warships for the U.S. Navy and private commercial ships after the war ended. When the United States became involved in World War II, the shipyard allocated its resources once again to the war effort. Federal Shipbuilding constructed eleven P2 transports during World War II, as well as cargo ships, destroyers, and tankers, for the U.S. Navy. The shipyard did not survive long in the post-war environment and eventually closed in 1949.<sup>6</sup>

## DESCRIPTION

The *General John Pope*, along with the rest of the *General* class, had two power plants rated at 17,000 shaft horsepower (shp) to drive two shafts to achieve the desired speed of 19 knots. The Maritime Commission had decided that the *General* class would be equipped with geared turbines, as opposed to the *Admiral* class, which had turbo-electric propulsion and a slightly higher horsepower (18,000 shp). The *General* class had two machinery spaces: one forward of the fuel tank and one aft. Inside these machinery spaces were four boilers (two for each shaft) built by Foster Wheeler. The forced draft boilers used oil to heat steam to 765° Fahrenheit, creating 465 psi. Twin funnels discharged the exhaust. The steam pipes fed into two De Laval turbines, each consisting of a high- and low-pressure turbine, which rotated a double-helical reduction gear built by De Laval. There were CO<sub>2</sub> fire suppression systems in the machinery spaces in the event of fire.<sup>7</sup>

The machinery spaces also housed systems that provided auxiliary power and air conditioning for the ship. Four diesel service generators on the “D” deck provided power for the ship. The DC generators delivered 400 kilowatts of power; two were rated at 120 volts and two at 240 volts. There were two auxiliary generator sets on the “B” deck that used DC power to supply an AC current rated at 440 volts for onboard equipment. One emergency generator in the forward funnel could power the navigation equipment if necessary. Security concerns prevented the inclusion of portholes in the ships’ sides, since the emission of light from them could allow enemy detection. In lieu of portholes, an air conditioning system consisting of 106 vents and 29 miles of ductwork was installed. This was a unique feature for a World War II-era troopship.

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<sup>6</sup> “Kearny Shipyard,” available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/kearny.htm>, accessed 16 January 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Description based on U.S. Navy, *Ships’ Data U.S. Naval Vessels: Auxiliary, District Craft, and Unclassified Vessels*, Vol. III (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 208-209; Plan Nos. MA20-1 and MA20-2, in “The Maritime Administration Collection of Ship Plans (1939-1970),” National Museum of American History, Washington, DC. Since designers were predominantly focused on troop safety, the ship was compartmentalized to combat flooding. Even though it was not economical to split the machinery space in commercial ships because it required two engineering crews, it was an advantageous feature for the military.

The air conditioning units circulated 34 million cubic feet of air an hour, which provided adequate ventilation for the troops.<sup>8</sup>

The bridge deck housed spaces related to the safety and navigation of the vessel. The wheelhouse in the forward navigation bridge deck contained an engine order telegraph, gyro repeater, and helm, which sent electric signals to the steering room where an electric-hydraulic ram turned the rudder. Two bridge wings extended off each side and contained engine order telegraphs and peloruses. Under the wheelhouse on the bridge deck were living accommodations for officers. On the bridge deck, there was a fire control room on the starboard side and a chartroom on the port side. On the same level, but in separate spaces, were the radar and ammunition clipping room, the former port and the latter starboard.

The majority of space on the ship was dedicated to berthing. The sheer size of the ship allowed enough berthing space for 5,289 troops (comprised of 393 officers and 4,896 enlisted personnel), along with the crew of 446 (comprised of forty officers and 426 enlisted).<sup>9</sup> The ship's officers and engineers resided on the bridge deck and below on the boat deck, while troop officers had quarters on the promenade deck within the forward superstructure. The enlistee beds were referred to as "standee bunks" or "pipe racks." These were stacked three or four high, covered with canvas, and connected by pipes leading from the ceiling to the floor to strengthen the rows.<sup>10</sup> The forward and stern sections on the "A", "B", and "C" decks were allocated for troop berthing while the crew accommodations were on the "B" deck in the mid-body of the ship. There were separate quarters for the naval gunners in the forward section of the "A" deck.

The ship had two galleys and five separate dining areas for the ship's crew, enlisted, and officers. A small officer's galley was on the promenade deck, while the main troop galley was on the "B" deck, along with sculleries for cleaning. The officer's galley on the boat deck served the ship's officers. There was also the troop officer's mess and the noncommissioned officers (NCO) mess on the promenade deck. The main galley serviced the ship's crew and the troops. The crew's mess was aft of the galley. Adjoining the galley and in the aft section were cafeteria serving lines for the troops, who ate in their berthing areas since there was no designated mess for them. The naval gunners had a separate mess in their living quarters.

There was ample space for dry and refrigerated stores in the Nos. 3 and 4 holds. At the bottom of the No. 4 hold were refrigerated storerooms for fruits and vegetables. Atop the hold were more refrigerated storerooms for meat and dairy products, along with a butcher shop. Forward of this were dry storerooms on the "D" deck in the No. 3 hold as well as below on the hold level. Crewmembers transported food from the storerooms to the galley using an electric elevator located forward of hatch No. 4.

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<sup>8</sup> Sawyer and White, *From America to United States*, p. 107. Portholes could be added as part of the post-war conversion if desired.

<sup>9</sup> Figures from U.S. Navy, *Ship's Data*, p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> A description of similar berthing arrangements on U.S. Army ships can be found in Charles Gibson with E. Kay Gibson, *Overseas: U.S. Army Maritime Operations, 1898 through the Fall of the Philippines* (Camden, ME: Ensign Press, 2002), p. 137, footnote 23.

Another important aspect to transporting troops to the battlefield was hygiene and sanitation. A barbershop, dentist office, and laundry facility on board helped promote good hygiene while underway. There was a laundry facility on “C” deck within the machinery space, and the barbershop and dentist offices were beside each other on the boat deck within the superstructure. A sufficient number of showers, toilets, and washrooms supplied with water from holding tanks coupled to a water treatment plant were located on the five decks within the ship. Four communal toilet and shower spaces were located in the bow and stern of both the “A” and “B” decks. There were additional communal showers, toilets, and washrooms on the promenade deck and “A” deck for the troop officers and NCOs. The ship’s officers shared the same amenities through adjoining doors on the bridge and boat decks.

To treat patients for major or minor maladies and to stop the spread of an epidemic (which was a major concern due to the number and proximity of people onboard the enclosed ships), there were medical facilities on the boat deck. These included a bacteria lab, clinic, doctor’s office, nurse’s station, and pharmacy, along with recovery and treatment rooms. Finally, for serious injuries or cases requiring surgery, an operating room was located behind the aft machinery casing.

The size and complexity of the design dictated that the ship have adequate repair facilities and storerooms. Against the hull of the engine room, there was a machine shop for fabricating parts onboard, along with an electric shop and engineering storage spaces. Additional storage space (designated the bosun’s stores) for the ship’s maintenance was in the forepeak of the ship.

The vessel was outfitted with five cargo holds and cargo-handling equipment to independently load and offload freight. Two masts supported eight booms that could lift between 5 and 10 tons of cargo. Four of the holds had external hatches that extended down to the “D” deck. Electric winches topside provided the means to lift and lower cargo, while the booms extending off each mast positioned it.

There were also numerous tanks in the ship’s inner bottom, the bow, and the stern, to carry fuel oil or water that served as ballast. The ship could hold 19,600 barrels of fuel, allowing it a maximum cruising radius of 12,000 nautical miles. As the ship consumed fuel, pumps within the hold transferred ballast water into empty tanks to maintain the correct stability and trim.

Safety features included numerous life rafts on the bridge deck and boat deck to accommodate the large number of troops onboard. During World War II, the Maritime Commission armed each ship with three types of guns (light, medium, and heavy) and positioned them around the ship to cover the four angles of attack. Atop the navigation bridge was a 1.1 medium anti-aircraft gun and a light 20-millimeter anti-aircraft gun.<sup>11</sup> On the navigation bridge were three more light 20-millimeter anti-aircraft guns and another 1.1 anti-aircraft gun. On the aft end of the bridge deck were four 20-millimeter anti-aircraft guns and two additional guns on the forward boat deck. On the bow, there were two 5”/38 dual-purpose guns (port and starboard)

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<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Navy began replacing all of the 1.1 anti-aircraft with the new Swedish 40-millimeter Bofor gun, because the 1.1 guns had a tendency to jam during the ejection cycle and had faulty sites. Although minor corrections were needed to fix the weapon, they were fundamentally sound, but the navy still chose to replace them.

with two more center-lined on the fantail that could be utilized as anti-aircraft and anti-ship guns. Ammunition trunks were in the bottom of the ship with a basic elevator transporting the powder and shells to the guns. After World War II, the armament was removed.

## OPERATIONAL HISTORY

General John Pope, for whom the ship was named, was born 18 March 1822 in Kentucky. After graduating from the Military Academy in 1842, Pope joined the Topographical Engineers. During the Civil War, he was appointed Brigadier General of Volunteers for the Union Army. He commanded the District of North and Central Missouri in May 1861 and later the Army of the Mississippi, where he was promoted to Major General. Pope then led the Army of the Virginia until the Second Battle of Bull Run. After the Civil War, Pope served in the Indian wars. He retired in 1886 and died in 1892 at the Ohio Soldier's Home.<sup>12</sup>

After the *General John Pope's* commissioning on 5 August 1943, the ship was immediately put into service transporting troops. The ship's first voyage took it to Scotland, returning in September. After a minor conversion in Norfolk, Virginia, that involved replacing the lifeboats with life rafts, the ship headed for the West Coast. For the next year and a half, the *Pope* was ferried troops and equipment between San Francisco and the southwest Pacific islands.<sup>13</sup>

The *General John Pope* (also called "Big John") continued transporting troops to the Pacific until the end of the war. In December 1944, it made one voyage to Bombay, India, and boarded 4,000 New Zealand troops, transporting them to Australia and New Zealand before returning to the United States in March 1945. The ship continued ferrying American troops between San Francisco and the Philippines, and also made one trip lasting from March to August 1945 from Marseilles, France, to Manila. At the end of the war, the *Pope* began the first of five voyages repatriating American service personnel from the warzone as part of "Magic Carpet."

In June 1946, the U.S. Navy decommissioned the *General John Pope*, and the U.S. Army received the ship. The army used it as a troopship until the late 1940s when it came under consideration for sale. The idea was soon put aside when the United States entered the Korean War. In July 1950, the U.S. Navy reacquired the vessel under the auspices of the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS).<sup>14</sup> The ship underwent a quick conversion and soon headed out transporting men and material from San Francisco to ports in Japan and Korea in support of the war effort through 1953. Between February and March 1953, the *General Pope* underwent a

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<sup>12</sup> Pope biographical information from U.S. Navy, *Dictionary of American Naval Ships*, Vol. III (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1991), pp. 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Operational history comes from U.S. Navy, *Dictionary*, p. 49; Ship Section, Bureau of Public Information, Navy Department, "History of U.S.S. General John Pope (AP-110), typewritten manuscript with "Stencilled-8/2/1946" on last page.

<sup>14</sup> Under a restructuring of the U.S. military in 1949, the U.S. Navy sought to manage all military shipping. The Pentagon awarded the contract to the navy, and it created a new agency within its department to administer the shipping fleet, Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS). In 1970, the navy changed MSTS to Military Sealift Command (MSC), and it continues to be the sole administrator of shipping for the Department of Defense. A summary of the history of the MSTS and the MSC can be found in Gibson, p. 169, footnote 15.

major refit to improve the quality of life for personnel onboard and to enhance the safety-at-sea features.

In May 1955, the U.S. Navy placed the *General Pope* in reserve status. The ship entered Seattle, Washington, with a skeleton crew for maintenance. The ship next sailed to Everett, Washington, without the crew. The U.S. Navy struck the ship from its active list in September 1958 and transferred the title to the U.S. Maritime Administration, which in turn placed the ship in its reserve fleet in Olympia, Washington.

The need for troop transports grew again as the United States became involved in the Vietnam War, so in August 1965, the ship was reactivated from mothball status. The U.S. Navy operated the *Pope* through MSTs, and it supported the war effort in Southeast Asia for the next five years. In 1970, the navy stopped using the transport and placed it in mothball status with the Maritime Administration in Suisun Bay, California. The ship remained on the list of U.S. Navy ships until October 1990, when the navy struck it from the list and transferred the title to the Maritime Administration in September 1992.

## CONCLUSION

The construction of the P2 transports was one small component of the overall war effort, but the Maritime Commission's vision and direction contributed to the successful outcome of the war. The construction of the *General* class exemplified the scope and capability of America's industrial might since the P2 transports were the largest ships constructed by the Maritime Commission. Although the P2 transports were never sold to commercial firms as planned, the U.S. military found the ships to be very useful. The service lives of both classes continued through the mid-1960s as the ships transported thousands of service members across the globe. In 1973, the military fully shifted from ship to aircraft as the principal means of deploying troops overseas, but the Maritime Administration preserved the ships in mothball status for future needs. As of 2008, the *General John Pope* was the sole remaining ship afloat in its class and was laid up Suisun Bay, California, in the National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF). In 2010, it was sold for scrap.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Winn B. Frank, "Farewell to the Troopship," *Naval History* 2, no. 1 (1997): pp. 41-44.

**APPENDIX A: The *General* Class**

Based on U.S. Maritime Administration classification of ship designs the P2-S2-R2 stands for:

P-Passenger

2 – 500-600-ft water line in feet

S – Geared Steam Turbine - 2 shafts

R2 – design number and alteration

*General John Pope* (AP-110)

*General A.E. Anderson* (AP-111)

*General W.A. Mann* (AP-112)

*General H.W. Butner* (AP-113)

*General William Mitchell* (AP-114)

*General George M. Randall* (AP-115)

*General M.C. Meigs* (AP-116)

*General W.H. Gordon* (AP-117)

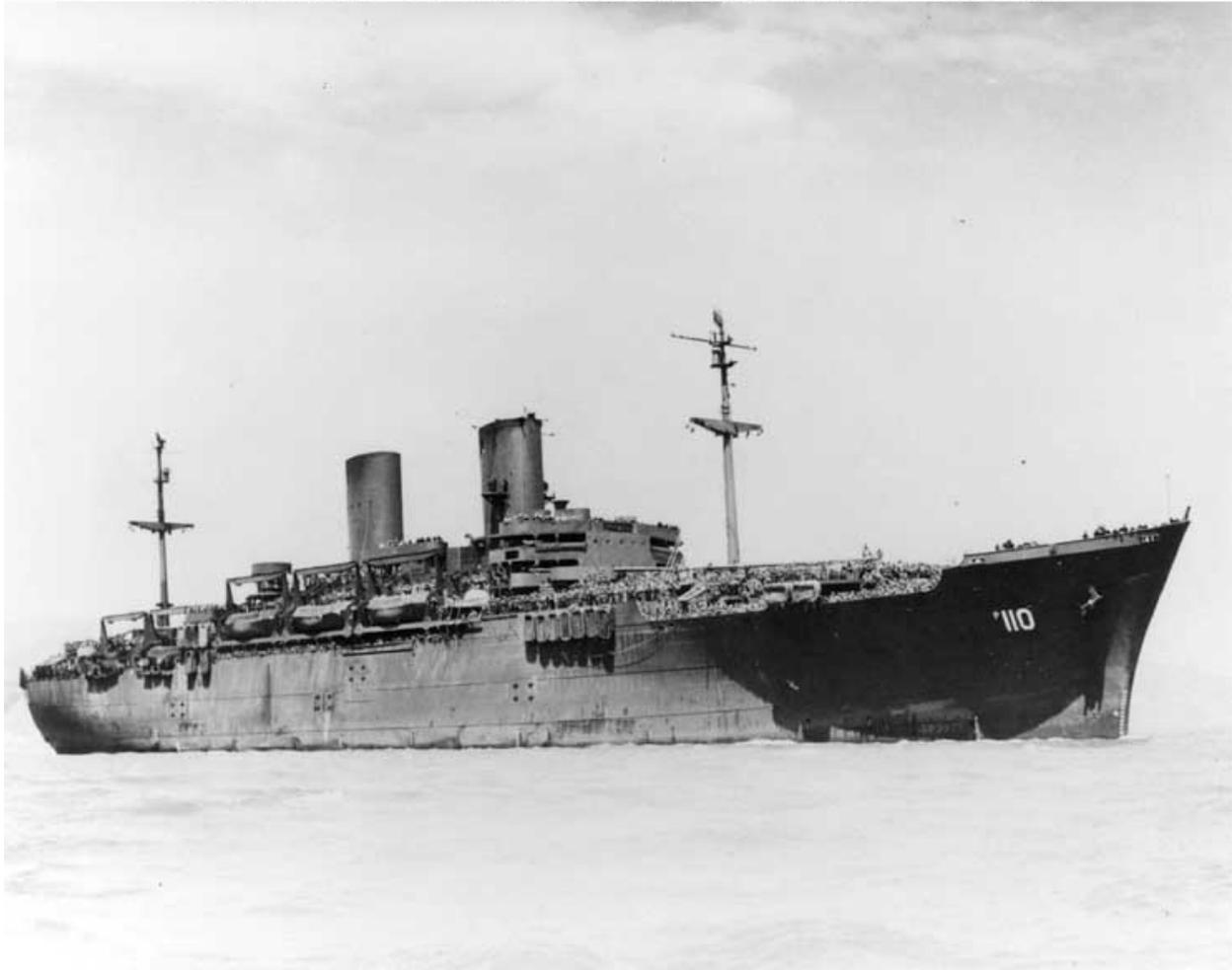
*General H.P. Richardson* (AP-118)

*General William Weigel* (AP-119)

*General J.C. Breckinridge* (AP-176)

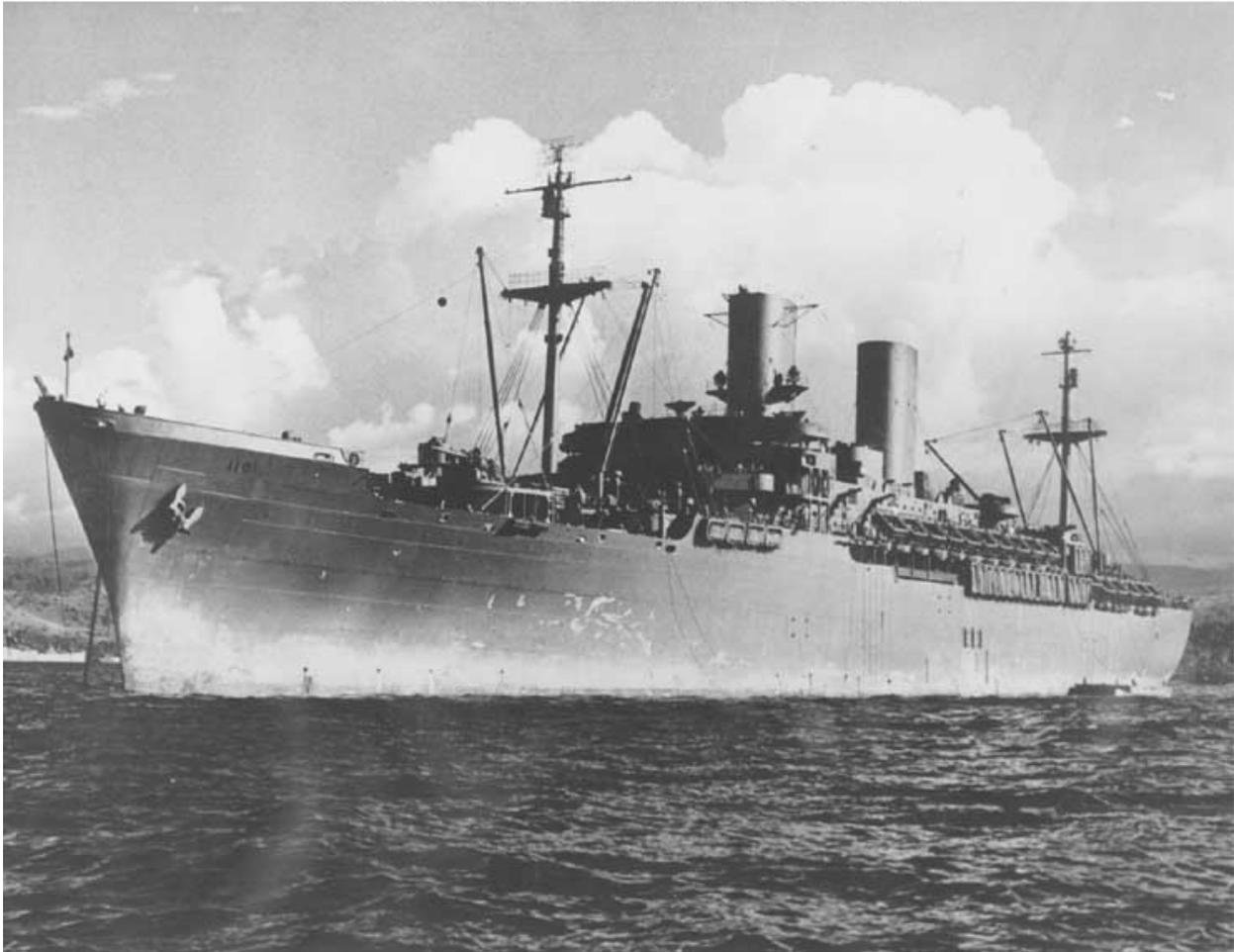
**APPENDIX B: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photo # NH 78646 USS General John Pope in San Francisco Bay circa 1945-1946



**Figure 1:** *General John Pope* in San Francisco Bay, ca. 1945-46 with troops on deck. Photograph #NH 78646, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC.

Photo # NH 82334 USS General John Pope circa 1944



**Figure 2:** *General John Pope*, ca. 1944. Photograph #NH 82334, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC.

Photo # NH 104269 USNS General John Pope between 1953 and 1955



**Figure 3:** *General John Pope*, ca. 1953-1955. Photograph# NH 104269, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC.

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